



In Ghana, witchcraft is popularly referred to as “African electronics,” and its reality is simply taken for granted. Like electronic gadgets, the workings are not visible, but they are no less real. Developing upon a few observations made by my colleague Opoku Onyinah in his two recent posts, I’d like to consider some of these issues with regards to family relations and to a recent news story.

First is his affirmation of my observation that in parts of Ghanaian society, some believe that witchcraft could be used for good and developmental purposes (see [“The Activity of Witches”](#)). We both cite the composition of a Ghanaian highlife musician who praises “white man’s witchcraft” as having been used for constructive purposes and damns Africans, almost without exception for using witchcraft for destructive purposes. In other words, this musician upholds the view that Africa’s lack of development may be due in part to the way that witchcraft is used; namely, to destroy.

The second observation is made in Onyinah’s second post, [“Witchcraft: Spiritual or Physical?”](#): The perpetrators of retrogressive witchcraft activities come from the household of victims. In other words, since witchcraft serves both good and evil purposes, where individuals or families stand with regards to wealth and development is determined by how “family witchcraft” has been used. Both of these observations are present in the topic developed below.

Murder in Ghana: Family Feuds, Witchcraft and the Travail of Life

Ghanaians woke up on Tuesday April 20, 2015 to the sad news that in the northern part of the country, a young man allegedly had shot his mother and three of his siblings with a gun. The mother and two of the siblings did not survive. The other who survived was still fighting for his life at the time of writing. The criminal act for which the gentleman is awaiting trial was based purely on accusations of witchcraft. In my experience the young man’s actions could have been instigated

by a diagnosis of whatever accounted for his lack of progress in life, a diagnosis either by a traditional diviner or an indigenous prophet.

This is common in our religious and cultural settings.

Accusations of witchcraft thrive in competitive and unequal situations in which people attempt to understand why some others do well and their own efforts seem to fail. The gentleman's reason for the act was that the mother who he believed had the powers of witchcraft had used it to enhance the life of his stepbrothers

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whilst using the same powers to destroy him. In other words, he operated within the worldview discussed in my last post that witchcraft is a neutral supernatural power that may be used either for good or for ill (see **"Black Witchcraft, White Witchcraft, and Development"**). In that post, we learned that in many African minds it is the use of "white witchcraft" that has helped the West to develop. The view is that in Africa witchcraft and wizardry powers are used to destroy when in fact it could be deployed for personal progress and communal development.

My interest in this story as it relates to the use of witchcraft has to do with the numbers of people who kill or maim their mothers, mothers-in-law, domestic

servants, grandmothers and other female relations in particular based on the perception that their progress in life may have stalled because such family members are using *African electronics* against them. The mere fact that it is called *African electronics* underscores the widely held perception that destructive witchcraft may basically be an African phenomenon. Its operations, like electronic gadgets may not be visible to the eye, but the belief is that witchcraft is real.

Related to that belief is how people come by the information that the sources of their problems in life lies within their own family, for after all as the Akan of Ghana say, "the insect that bites you is the one already hidden in your clothes." This is where the family comes in. In other words, supernatural evil is caused by people you call kith and kin. For those who believe in consulting shrine priests and diviners, they receive diagnosis of the sources of their problems from these religious functionaries.

The Church and the spread of . . . Witchcraft

The rise of independent Christian prophetic movements in sub-Saharan Africa has increased witchcraft accusations. At prayer services and prophetic meetings, they sustain traditional beliefs of their patrons that retrogression in life is caused by family members. Onyinah mentions "dreams" as an important means discerning the activities of witchcraft (see, for example, **"What is Witchcraft?"**). Incidentally both shrine priests/diviners and Spiritual church prophets are considered important for their ability to interpret especially evil dreams.

As I tell my students, if God was in the business of killing other people's enemies, nobody would be left on planet earth!

The phenomenon of responding to the workings of witchcraft has become part of Christian prayer culture in sub-Saharan Africa and this goes beyond denominational boundaries and theological orientations. Consider the following prayer put in *Daily Graphic* by the Enoch Aminu, Nigerian founder and leader of the **Pure Fire Miracle Ministries**, a charismatic church based in Accra Ghana: "enemy devices monitoring my progress, backfire in the name of Jesus...I command the thunder and lightening of God to strike and destroy any witchcraft altar against my life in the name of Jesus" (*Daily Graphic*, Monday March 2, 2015). On Monday December 22, 2014, Pastor Enoch

Aminu had put the following statement in a piece titled "Increase the Level of Your Fire" in his "Spiritual Warfare" column in *Daily Graphic*:

When your prayer pronouncements lack the backing of the Holy Spirit, witches and wizards in your family can block your way. When your prayers do not carry the required spiritual potency, witches and wizards in your environment can make life difficult for you and your families.

These worldviews on witchcraft and how to assault them through prayer are now not limited to indigenous prophetic ministries of the Pentecostal/charismatic type but diffused within Christianity generally, including renewal movements operating within historic mission denominations. To illustrate the point consider the following lines from a prayer booklet issued by the Bible Study and Prayer Group in one congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The prayer is supposed to be for those looking for the fruit of the womb, that is, children:

I bind, plunder and render to nothing every testimony, anti-miracle and anti-prosperity force in the name of Jesus...Let every design against my giving birth, be completely nullified in the name of Jesus...I break myself loose from the bondage of stagnancy in the mighty name of Jesus. (p. 18)

A prayer line supposed to be for those praying against miscarriages is also instructive:

Let the spiritual parasites which are feeding on the seeds of my womb be roasted in the name of Jesus...Let all demonic eyes monitoring my body and progress receive blindness in the name of Jesus...I break the powers of the occult, witchcraft and familial spirits over my life in the name of Jesus. (p. 22)

It is important to pay attention to the imprecatory tone of these prayers. Contemporary prophetic leaders have a penchant for leading members to repeat imprecatory prayers that in the spirit of Psalm 35 literally ask God to physically kill and maim those plotting evil against them through witchcraft. Thus the expression "return to sender," meaning "afflict those working against me with the same evils they wish for me" has become an important mantra in this form of Christianity.

What the young man did physically by killing members of his family under suspicions of using witchcraft against him, we also find others doing the same at what are supposed to be Christian prophetic prayer services where the fire of God is invoked to kill those who work against the progress of his children. As I tell my students, if God was in the business of killing other people's enemies, nobody would be left on planet earth! Even if we consider that our imaginations of the sources of witchcraft are credible, God says "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezek. 33:11)!



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